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Making Marx Marx

Terrell Carver

The context through which readers – academic and otherwise – have come to know Marx as Marx was not discovered. It was constructed by Marx in the first instance, and by others during his lifetime and afterwards. This context – biographical and bibliographical – has a profound effect on who anyone thinks Marx is, or in rather more cases, who he was, since he was little noticed as a public figure in his lifetime (1818-1883), even when he (and a very few others) were at pains to present a *persona* – and eventually a ‘brand’ – to a receptive audience.

Suffice to say that Marx’s subsequent biographers and bibliographers have had much more influence over what we know about him than he did himself; or rather, what he told us about himself at different stages of his life has been assimilated in various ways to reinforce what the more-or-less authorised biographers think we should know about his ‘life and thought’ (quoting the generic subtitle given to his and other intellectual biographies). And of course, as he was living the life, thinking the ‘thought’, and writing the works, an ‘everyday’ context of uncertainty and contingency was in place: Marx did not already know he was Marx in the later contextual sense. Even when he was presenting himself to readers, and reviewing his life to date, he was forward-looking and action-oriented in relation to his presumed audience, rather than backward looking over something ‘done’ and therefore ‘to be known’, which is the biographer’s-eye view. Scholarly constructions of context are generally posthumous (and decades later, in Marx’s case) and couched in a genre that is neither the everyday (since readers are presented with a life-story that has ended) nor the autobiographical (as Marx’s self-characterizations certainly were).

This article reviews what we think we know about Marx in the light of the above analytical claims. It then courts controversy by finding a downside to the production of the various sets of complete works – or at least very large major collections of scholarly significance – that have been attempted and occasionally completed, as completion is variously defined.

Form and content

Biographies are exercises in hindsight, and bibliographies are exercises in canon-formation. These are technologies of knowledge-production, and therefore of time-travelling immediacy. But to achieve this immediacy (and consequent ‘reality-effect’) these highly complex technologies strive to erase themselves, so that they do not spoil the view.¹ Technological smudges on this window-like transparency are generally banished to footnotes and appendices in scholarly works, where readers can engage with archival ‘sources’ and ‘secondary’ commentary. In popular works these traces of scholarly construction disappear, or are banished to endnotes.² However, the auto- and other biographies of Marx have individual histories and methodologies, and each of these works itself has a context and a purpose. Marx cannot have the same ‘life and thought’, and rank-ordered list of ‘great works’, for anyone and everyone for all time, no matter who and where they are. Yet the ‘definitive’ intellectual biography lurks as a kind of Platonic ideal (or Weberian ideal-type) that Marxologists should supposedly be aiming for.

Much the same problem with teleology and projection applies to what we think Marx looked like: the earliest images date from his late teens/early twenties, but few (other than his immediate family) would recognise then or now the youthful student-in-uniform without some prompting. There is quite a big gap until the first real photograph (in his early forties, with bushy beard), but he is not instantly recognisable as the Marx we know (and love or hate) until he was in his late fifties. That magisterial and somewhat authoritarian ‘look’ was assimilated to a biographical *persona* that

postdated the image by about a decade, and that grey-bearded face has become Marx-as-Marx in a timeless – and in Highgate Cemetery – formidably stony way.

Formal photographic portraiture is itself iconic, but only if the right kind of notoriety – akin in this case to hagiography and demonology – is intertextually constructed to go with the picture. Even when authenticated images do not survive (or were never made) we line our pantheons with images that are larger-than-life, or that ‘want’ us to see them that way (Mitchell, 2005). Their setting – whether in a building, as an outdoor monument or on a book cover – tells us already that they are ‘great’. The cover portrait tells us already that a book is a biography, and with rare exceptions, not a book about a ‘nobody’. Few biographers remind us – other than in passing – of the ‘nobody’ images which are closer to the person who wrote then-unknown (or little known) works.

This article will briefly – and critically – recount the processes through which Marx was made into Marx, starting with his little-remarked ‘presentation of self in everyday life’ (Goffman, 1990) in a newspaper note of 1847. This choice will emphasise an everyday rather than the more usual ‘world historical’ way of looking at Marx. The ‘world historical’ view of the man is very much through the wrong end of the telescope; he and his life become small, because he is dead (and no longer ‘larger than life’) and only some things are important from this ‘ultimate’ perspective. If we take a view from 1847, however, we know that the world-changing and life-altering events of ‘the ’48’ revolutions were on the way, but he did not; we know that he had elaborated plans for political critiques of ‘bourgeois society’, but he could not then know the processes of truncation that would frustrate his efforts. Biographers have a verbal mood of their own, e.g. ‘Here is where he *would later* do/write/fall in love/die’ etc., thus investing what appears to be a moment in life-experience with the kind of significance that is the hallmark of historiography. In those locutions, known ‘greatness’ overtakes what was once the everyday unknowingness of lived experience. I am resisting that in opening with an autobiographical text which is quite obscure.

After that I will pick out some historical and contemporary highlights in the reception of Marx (or rather projection of ‘Marx’ into the documentary remains that count as evidence) in order to show how politicised this process was, even when it was purportedly scholarly in intent and form. These vignettes are of course indicative rather than comprehensive. I have eschewed taking any obvious swipes at what are obviously propaganda materials from the USSR or DDR, for example, though there is doubtless an interesting project there in ferreting out interesting variations from the repetitive themes that constituted communist orthodoxies. Instead I will focus on a point of origin – the republication of *The Communist Manifesto* by a German socialist party in 1872 – and pick up a few subsequent ‘Marxes’ as they appear in biographical works familiar to Anglophone and other academic audiences. These begin appearing only in 1918 – Franz Mehring’s *Karl Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens*³ – and of course the activity continues to date. While the genre (intellectual biography) is very largely the same over this time, and while there is considerable repetition in factual (that is, well-attested) content, there are subtle (and occasionally massive) shifts in what is said to be important about Marx, such that we should want to read (and generally revere) him as a great ‘thinker’.

The most important place to track these developments that have made Marx Marx is not in the biographical narratives *per se*, but rather in the bibliographical selections, listings and evaluations that the biographers produce or reproduce. In the case of a thinker (of most any kind, or even painter or composer) the attribution of major or minor status to a work – or even manuscript, unfinished or rough-draft ‘work’ – represents the narrative device through which a biography proceeds in an overall chronological way. Perhaps the clearest example of this scaffold-like interaction between vertical chronology and horizontal bibliography is V. Adoratskij’s (1933)

remarkable *Karl Marx: Chronik seines Lebens in Einzeldaten* (1934), and subsequent similar works that use the same system: while the diary-like structure would seem to recount the everyday, whatever that was for a particular day as recorded in some way (usually in letters), the animating impulse is clearly the story of the great works (already known to the chronicler in a hierarchy), since the everyday would – so it is presumed – be of little interest. Such everyday details would not construct the life as that of a ‘thinker’, though a sprinkling of these ‘human’ touches – even in a dry chronology – is *de rigueur*.⁴

At this point it should come as no surprise that the selection and hierarchy of works through which Marx told his readers about himself – at the few points when he did so – is startlingly different from the selection and hierarchy as it has been constructed – and significantly re-constructed – in the 130 or so years since his death (Thomas, 1991). The conclusion here is not that he was right about this and others wrong, or that any of the others is ‘more right’ than another. Rather my conclusion is that the process of canon-formation has another dimension, which needs critical exploration.

Canon-formation is observable not just in re-published (or re-constructed and newly published) individual works, a strategy energetically pursued by Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) after Marx’s death, and proceeding apace ever since. Nor is canon-formation solidified in the various selections and collections of works (whether complete, completed or excerpted) that have been commonly produced and globally circulated since the 1930s. Rather in the 1920s canon-formation took an important turn and upped-the-stakes by going into a ‘complete works’ or multi-volume ‘major collections’ format. This is a distinctive process that continues, but appears over and above scrutiny as an arcane, scholarship-for-the-scholars archival activity.

There are now massive runs of massive volumes that bring Marx’s *oeuvre* (as defined by bibliographers) to worldwide audiences in the original languages (not always German) and in various uniform translations. These collections incorporate editorial judgements and bibliographical hierarchies that contrast starkly with the everyday context through which Marx wrote what he wrote in order to do what he was doing. Indeed even the physical attributes of producing such books (or current on-line reader-technologies reflecting this) work against a merging of interpretive horizons between Marx’s everyday political activism and readers’ perceptions. In short with the production of collected works Marx – notwithstanding homage to him as ‘man and fighter’⁵ – became another great writer or thinker, even philosopher, on the library shelves and readings lists. There he is on a par with, but perhaps unfortunately assimilated to, the likes of Aristotle or Leibniz, Kant or Hegel, or any number of other productions in the ultimate scholarly genre – the complete works, correspondence and ‘papers’, edited and reproduced on sound principles, beautifully printed and uniformly bound and ‘helpfully’ numbered (even if some of these systems are the bane of librarians and readers). Genres have properties, and properties have consequences (White, 1987).

This article concludes by recounting gains and losses that result from the application of the principles of bibliographical science to Marx’s works, and in that way presenting his life – albeit implicitly – as best understood in the way that scholars of the highest authority have determined. In other words, complete works is a genre, form (to some considerable degree) determines content, and reading is then path-dependent. This is not to say that it is a bad thing to have 30-odd or 50 (or nearly 150) volumes of works by Marx (and by Engels) on the shelf, but rather that there might be losses, as well as gains. Gain and loss, of course, are relative to the reader and the project-in-hand, and I am certain that not all will agree with my ‘take’ on the situation. The object, however, is to invite further informed scrutiny, rather than simply to accept a product, even a scholarly one, at face value.

Marx's 'selfie': No. 1⁶

After submission of his doctoral thesis on classical Greek philosophy (by post to the University of Jena, which he had never attended), and after having abandoned any hopes of an academic position (owing to governmental hostility to 'revolutionary radicalism' and potentially treasonous actions), Marx took up political journalism in 1842-1843, writing muck-raking reportage during a brief period when the censorship was relatively relaxed. His contributions included articles on agricultural poverty in the Rhineland; angry leading articles on press freedom, divorce law and similar civil issues; and *ad hominem* critiques directed at political 'schools of thought' which were then necessarily masquerading as merely of intellectual interest. Marx was generally pursuing what in twentieth-century terms is a classically liberal agenda and values, namely advocacy of popular sovereignty, representative and responsible government, and equality before the law, albeit in a still-censored press and hostile political climate of anti-constitutional monarchical authoritarianism. The rights and liberties that were (to an extent) established in constitutional regimes post-World War I – and therefore rather unquestioned by his earliest biographers – were, in the days of the *Vormärz* (i.e. before the western and central European revolutions of March 1848) perceived as much, much more radical, even if put in reformist terms. Liberalism was far from respectable and was indeed seditious and treasonable. To the established religio-political regimes it was the slippery slope to the extremisms and terrorisms of the French revolution of not many decades earlier.

After the Prussian government closed down his newspaper in Cologne, Marx ventured into the same political/intellectual territory in the 'special number' (there was only ever one issue) of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844), a highly collaborative and now very rare volume of political essays. His subsequent book-length venture, published abroad (in Paris and Brussels) but in German (thus evading Prussian domestic censorship), was written in conjunction with his new friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels. This was *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Company* (4: 5-211).⁷ In it the two made a polemical attempt to 'out-radical' the radicals, who were, in terms of background and university education, not very much different from Marx himself. During 1845-46, the two activists and self-styled communists – in conjunction with other collaborators – were engaged in drafting a sequel and stinging riposte to their critics. But then after difficult and trying experiences with various co-authors and publishers, such that hardly anything emerged, Marx went into print to tell readers something about himself.

Marx posted a public notice of 8/9 April 1847 (6: 72-74), which was published in the *Deutsche-Brüsseler-Zeitung* (an *émigré* paper in Brussels where he was then living) and in the *Trier'sche Zeitung* (his hometown paper in Trier). The details he recounts there are now obscure and were even then convoluted, but the Marx-project in self-publicity was clearly underway. Amidst his angry denunciation of a newspaper correspondent who had attributed works and remarks to him that he strenuously disavowed, Marx presented the unknowing reader with a view of himself and his activities for the first time. He was evidently assured at this point that there was something really to talk about, both in terms of his past accomplishments (of a bare four years) and future expectations, or at least he clearly wanted readers to think so.

The opening salvo of his then-untitled notice '[Declaration against Karl Grün]' informs his (German-speaking) readers that he has a pamphlet in press in French (6: 105-212), through which he takes on a major figure in European intellectual and political life, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon's book *System of Economic Contradictions* of the previous year had been widely reviewed and noted, and for educated Germans the French language, its literature and political thought, were truly international and *sans pareil*. Moreover in terms of works on the social question, and thus of a socialist bent, French writers – including, and especially, thinkers now classified as utopians⁸ – were

authoritative. Marx was here trailing his next riposte: *The Poverty of Philosophy. Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon*.

In an interesting publicity slant Marx promotes Proudhon as a major author of European repute (and thus himself as author of a major and wittily titled counter-blast) by denigrating a hapless German, the Karl Grün of the subject matter and later editorial title. Grün was author of a supposedly comprehensive survey of social movements in France and Belgium (1845) and just recently the translator into German of the very work of Proudhon's (1846) to which Marx was replying. Having disposed of a rival authority (on social movements *and* on Proudhon's latest work), Marx informs his readers very directly:

My criticism of Proudhon is written *in French*. Proudhon himself will be able to reply. A letter he wrote to me before the publication of his book shows absolutely no inclination to leave it to Herr Grün and his associates to avenge him in the event of criticism on my part (6: 73).

Readers now know that the 'editor of the *former Rheinische Zeitung*', a locution and fact that Marx was careful to rehearse in his text, was the 'go-to' source for the latest views and reviews of Proudhon's popular and contentious work. They could also deduce that the famous Frenchman had – as it happens – been in prior correspondence with the leading German journalist on the subject, namely Marx. Moreover it was also evident that unlike other less enterprising and less talented Germans, he (Marx) was not only adept in French but enterprising as an equal of and rival to a major European figure in intellectual and political life.

Rubbing in the lesson Marx then dismisses not only Herr Grün as any kind of competitor to himself, but also disparages his own German context and supposed associates for small-minded effrontery in presuming that 'foreign socialism' was a subject about which they were competent to pronounce for the benefit of 'the German world'. In a final twist Marx then presents Grün as credulous (rather than credible) in relation to Marx's own newspaper articles – which he is clearly signalling as intellectual milestones of general interest. This was particularly the case in relation to Proudhon's 'economics'. The characterisation of Proudhon's Hegelian work on a 'system of economic contradictions' as an 'economics' is far from an accidental contraction. It was rather a signal to readers to listen up and read his forthcoming critique of the great man on *the* important subject, over and above a critique of Proudhon's bad Hegelian – i.e. German – philosophy, on which subject readers would presume or know of Marx's expertise (6: 73-74).

Marx's 'selfie': No. 2

The next episode in making Marx Marx coincided with the forecast engagement with 'economics', i.e. political economy as published and discussed through the 1840s. During the intervening years to 1859 Marx had made contact with authoritative sources on the subject, in the original French and English. These authorities were rather more interesting than Proudhon, even if they were not as politically prominent as the would-be radical had been during heady days of the European *Vormärz*. Marx's interlocutors in his published *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo and similar figures, were nearly all dead, and – with few exceptions – not noted as intellectuals over-much concerned with the social question (except in decidedly non-socialist ways), their occasional doubts and misgivings about 'the poor' notwithstanding.

However, these the political economists were – as Marx struggled to make obvious – far more influential in the practical terms set by modern, free-trading and commodity-producing societies than socialists and communists had yet managed to be, when they argued that public control should

trump the supposed self-regulating properties of 'the market'. And again he shifted languages – somewhat perversely it seems, given his political exile in England from 1849 – by reverting to German, and thus necessarily to the German-speaking audience. Given the difficulties that the *émigré* Marx family faced during the 1850s the use of German is understandable. But compared with his previous self-image as the next socialist of general European interest – the French-speaking equal of Proudhon – the reversion is a notable one.

Moreover at this time – 1859 – Marx also looked to Engels to present his *persona* to the world in the guise of book reviews planted in the German press. Marx's own autobiographical and auto-bibliographical Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 (29: 261-5), and Engels's summarising review of Marx's book of the same year (16: 465-477), both had somewhat wider (German-speaking) contemporary audiences than the rest of his slim volume. But both have had extensive popular and scholarly treatments – directly encountered or in paraphrased form – only in twentieth-century publications. Marx's first (and only) self-conscious autobiography is sketched in this Preface in a few rather disjointed paragraphs (he was evidently up against a publisher's deadline), and unlike the press note of 1847, he shows some concern to tell the story of his life.

This Preface, of course, was in a censored publication, and in any case, the genre of the *Contribution* was that of rigorous (*wissenschaftlich*) critique of a thoroughly serious (indeed rather famously dismal) subject. For Marx, though, this critique was rather more philosophical and critical in method than empirical and quantitative (that methodological 'turn' dates from the later 1870s). The text of the Preface was at-hand for Marx's first biographer, Franz Mehring, writing during World War I, and the biographical detail and bibliographical listing are now perhaps overly familiar through repetition in numerous subsequent biographical notes and biographies. It is worth somewhat de-familiarising these passages here: readers should note Marx's lengthy treatment of the early journalism, now little read, even by specialists; his highlighting of the published 'Introduction' (3: 175-187) to a critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (but not 'On the Jewish Question' (3: 146-174), his other contribution to the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, now carefully studied), and his studious avoidance of his polemical escapades, such as his first book, *The Holy Family*.

Today's readers might wonder what happened to the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844' (3: 229-346), not hinted at in any way, and to the book-length study *The German Ideology* (5: 19-539), referenced obliquely (by twentieth-century editors) to an abandoned manuscript critique of 'the ideological view of German philosophy'. Both are now not only canonical but generally top of the list of excerpted 'must-reads' for students, but the publication of both as book-length 'works' dates only from 1932. Marx of course was keen to direct readers to writings – even if not book-length ones – that they could actually or least conceivably read: he specifically mentions the 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (6: 477-519; see also Marx (1996: 1-30), which is now top of the canonical list). But in 1859 it apparently has equal status with the (French-language) 'Discourse on Free Trade' (6: 450-465), which is now seldom reproduced and little read. The (French-language) *Poverty of Philosophy* is highlighted but rather bracketed off as polemical by comparison with the present, *wissenschaftlich* and thus very sober critique of a literature, rather than of a person, who was by then somewhat eclipsed.

The next long paragraph of bibliographical information is quite striking: Marx notes his work on the revolutionary liberal/radical *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848-49 as an interruption to his economic studies, and addresses his voluminous work (some of it written by Engels) for the *New York [Daily] Tribune* in the 1850s in rather similar terms. But – warming to this journalism theme – he writes that 'articles on striking economic events in England and on the Continent constituted so considerable a

part of my contributions [to the newspaper] that I was compelled to make myself familiar with practical details which lie outside the sphere of the actual science [*Wissenschaft*] of political economy' (29: 264-265). Given that Marx was promoting himself as a studious critic of political economy, the presumptive hierarchy here reflects his interest in getting a serious-minded and scholarly audience on-side, so – if we read these comments the other way round – his mentioning journalism at all makes an important point in relation to his own evaluation of his activities.

Today's readers will also note the absence of *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973), an edited *collection* of 'economic' manuscripts from just this period, now so canonical as to be commonly referenced as a 'book' (which, even at its first publication, in two volumes 1939-41, it never was). Note also that the abandoned 'Introduction (1857)' (Marx, 1973: 81-111) was never an introduction to 'it'.⁹ Overall Marx frames (and ends) his autobiography by identifying himself (and his quite varied writings as mentioned) with 'conscientious research' (29: 265), which certainly seems fair enough. But what happened to him when *others* framed his activity with a *persona* of their own making?

*Iconising Marx*¹⁰

In 1872 a number of individuals – rather than Marx, or Engels in his publicity-manager mode – consciously embarked on a political process of constructing a *persona* for the pair of them (and the pairing is notable). That process was intended to create Marx as an iconic founding father of socialism, and in particular of a major tendency in the German socialist movement. This current of thought was associated with the otherwise informal 'Marx party' – a loose grouping of German revolutionaries of 1848-49 who had returned from exile after the amnesty of 1862. After that, the faction developed around Marx's sometime friend and near-contemporary Wilhelm Liebknecht and a bit later the younger August Bebel. (Not that they didn't have their political differences; see Draper 1994: 36-38.) There was nothing inevitable about their decision to publish a little-known text, and those decisions were the ones which created Marx as we know him. The mass recirculation of the 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (retitled *The Communist Manifesto*) in 1872, and this 'feature' edition with a signed authorial preface, sparked over the years an enormous number of reprints and translations – and that process created Marx as a world-historical figure (Draper 1994: 48-52; Kuczynski 1995: 195-201). Until that point he was very little known (and then hardly ever favourably) outside the limited circles of German socialism.

In the special Preface to the 'feature' edition of the *Manifesto* in 1872 – which Marx and Engels were pressed into writing – they sound really rather bemused about the re-publication of the somewhat scrappy little work. After all, they had written quite a few things that had had their day in the struggle, and, given that the struggle for them was still very much on-going, what exactly was the point of looking back? Hadn't the *Manifesto* really manifested not very much at all, and wasn't the real point to write a new one anyway? Of all the pieces to pick to advertise Marx, and to set people straight about contemporary politics, this long-forgotten flash-off-the-press was for Marx and Engels themselves hardly the obvious choice.

Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel and their colleagues were rather better at 'branding' Marx than Engels had been in 1859, and the audience 'hook' was indeed looking backward, but not to Marx as a person and what he did in the revolution, since the goal of the exercise was different. The object was to get him (and the party organization and the 'Marx party' tendency, internally conflicted as it was) much better known and mutually identified in the present. By 1872 the events and personalities of 1848 had faded enough into history to make a resurrection of the 'glory days' of the revolutions an option. Looked at that way, the little committee needed something colourful to head up their project that wasn't a heroic tale about a person, yet would identify someone living with the

'glory days' and socialist truths. Only a very few had any knowledge of the *Manifesto* at all, and it was almost impossible to find and read. But it was a good choice. And fortunately yet another treason-trial had lately put the text into the public record (Draper 1994: 48-49).

In their 1872 Preface (23: 714-175) Marx and Engels are overtly critical of the whole enterprise of publishing the document from bygone days again, fearful that the obvious anachronisms would show them in a bad light. They caution readers to remember that the political and economic situation relevant to the development of socialism had changed radically over nearly twenty-five years, and that overall the *Manifesto* was in fact merely historical – not really a manifesto anymore at all. Even the review of communist literature in section III was written off, since it terminated in 1847 and could not therefore provide up-to-date ideas. The 'general principles' in the text, while broadly endorsed (but not enumerated in the new Preface), were referenced only in relation to the recent events of the Paris Commune, and then the reader was directed to a document that was in fact up to date, namely *The Civil War in France* (22: 307-355). This had just been published in 1871 by the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, and was written by Marx (in English) on their behalf.

Even by the 1870s hardly any of Marx's works were available, except in very limited editions of short print-runs for German-speakers, though doubtless some had a life in second-hand shops and hand-around usage, even if we do not really know what for. Marx and his writings were a long way from becoming an object of study (beyond the very, very occasional respectful review), and his 'thought' – as the contemporary reference in the Preface of 1872 itself demonstrates – was addressed to and evaluated within on-going political circumstances. This applied to even the most 'academic' productions of (apparently) non-polemical critique. Given that the man was actually alive and politically engaged – in correspondence and organizational affairs – he could not be a cult figure, and refused this by repute. Engels repeats Marx's 'I am not a Marxist' overheard remark somewhat differently in two items of correspondence after Marx's death (46: 356; 49: 7), and this comment fits with the rest of what we know about the (not yet even then) 'great man'.

Choosing something untimely (that is, 'out of time'), as the *Manifesto* then was, usefully displaces intra-tendency debate on contemporary questions. It does this by highlighting a supposed common heritage that is just far enough in the past to be past generating controversy in the present. The focus on Marx as lead author did much the same job as the republication of the text by the 'Marx party', despite his status as a (voluntary) exile, his 'academic' inaccessibility as author of *Capital*, and his scary reputation as a political operator. Engels, who had by far the more brilliant career and public *persona* up to 1845, had by 1872 somewhat slipped from view into his self-adopted role as 'second fiddle'. The republication of the *Manifesto* did not create Marx 'the great man'; but then Marx the 'great man' did not exist before the republication of this rather *outré* pamphlet. The highly readable text did its work in making the man 'great', though not at all for the reasons he – so far as we can tell – really wanted, or Engels either. But then simple pictures are the easiest to 'get' – the man became great because he wrote the people's manifesto, and the people's manifesto cast greatness upon its author. The two became iconic together.

Shelving Marx

A collected works project for Marx was mooted by himself in the early 1850s, and after convoluted negotiations – given that he and his ilk were under suspicion in the run-up to the Communist Trial of late 1852 – the first instalment of his *Collected Essays* (*Gesammelte Aufsätze von Karl Marx*) was published in Cologne in April 1851. It contained two of his articles (one complete, one in part) dating from his liberal-radical journalism of 1842 (38: 614-615 n. 347). The contextual politics of the 1850s

suggests that his political journalism of the revolutionary and immediate post-revolutionary period would have been the major and featured items, eventually as the series progressed, given that at exactly this time Marx and Engels were also negotiating with a Swiss publisher to continue their Hamburg-based 'political-economic review'. This was the successor to their revolutionary *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which had succumbed to the defeats of 1849 (Mehring 1936: 209). In the six issues of their 'review' the two authors/editors recounted the events and prospects of the on-going class struggles in France and elsewhere (10: 5-6).

It seems highly unlikely that manuscript works, undertaken to clarify his own thinking, would feature in this publication process, even if Marx had been motivated to finish them (or at least tidy them up). Perhaps there are circumstances under which he would have completed his draft *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, or extracted his thoughts on 'alienation' from his 'excerpt notebooks' – which intermingled quotations from political economists with his first ruminations of critique (Rojahn, 2006: 30-31) – but this seems far-fetched. Marx was busy enough in the 1850s with seriously innovative researches into writers and concepts that were more pertinent after the revolution than before (which isn't at all to say that his early thoughts have nothing to do with his later ones). But on the whole he was little inclined to self-conscious 'mining' or recycling of messy thoughts in messy manuscripts; in fact over the years he was more inclined to make 'fresh starts' than to rework previous drafts (and also to change his detailed plans) (Rojahn, 2006: 31-32). The manuscripts he left aside in the 1840s were generally directed – one way or another – at political opponents, and at a kind of politics, that was no longer current from the 1850s onwards. Rather than a backward looking and somewhat narcissistic exercise, the planned collection looks rather more like it was intended to recirculate only those items which would raise issues – such as press freedom and representative government – that were still politically current and currently controversial. In relation to collecting his own works, Marx was an activist/journalist in his *persona*, and his self-defined 'canon' a reflection of that.

After Marx's death in 1883, the situation changed quite dramatically in two ways. Engels's republication of his works with new introductions and prefaces proceeded very much along the 'political' lines outlined above. But Engels's own works, authorially introduced and successfully circulated, promoted his projects, ideas, debts and glosses as following directly from, and intentionally supplementary to, Marx's 'thought'. Engels was a system-builder, and so presented Marx as a scientist and philosopher as these activities were conceived of in the 1870s and 1880s (Carver, 2003: ch. 5). While the 'Graveside Speech' materials (24: 463-481) for Marx set the tone, Engels's works – such as *Anti-Dühring* (25: 5-309), *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (24: 281-325), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (26: 129-276), and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (26: 353-398) – re-branded Marx over and above the political 'greatness' he had been awarded in 1872. Engels capitalised on his similar status, but not for himself. What could have been canon-confusion between the two was effectively smoothed over by the 'Marxism' which emerged from the merged canon. This process was notably advanced by Karl Kautsky, Georgii Plekhanov, Antonio Labriola and many others, political differences and partisan squabbles notwithstanding.

The other key development was Franz Mehring's (1902) work on the Marx-Engels *Nachlaß*, the archival legacy. His catalogue listing laid the groundwork not just for his own biography, which – true to the genre – makes Marx a man of 'works', which are then contextualised with life-interest and political narrative. Mehring did not live to consider an edition of collected works, however. After a false start 1911-1913,¹¹ that project was undertaken by D.B. Riazanov (in conjunction with a Russian-German team of scholars and activists) in the early 1920s (Zhao, 2014: 12-14). This resulted, albeit

incompletely, in 11 volumes of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, discontinued under his successor at the outset of World War II. Unlike the mooted collected works in the 1850s, Riazanov's Marx-Engels-Institute (and its partner enterprises in Germany) proceeded on an academically-derived and scientifically-oriented set of principles. The the model they generated was intended to be an exemplar of historical accuracy, rigorous textual method and scrupulous objectivity, ring-fenced within an overall political – and politicising – intent (the small print-runs and formidable scholarly apparatus notwithstanding) (Zhao, 2014: 16-18). While the later, revived *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* project of the 1970s (known as MEGA², and still continuing) differs somewhat from Riazanov's plan and methodology, the overall outlines are quite self-consciously similar. It is to some of these similarities that I wish to turn here and to comment on critically.

Riazanov's plan involved not merely a chronology and authorisation of Marx-Engels works but a separation and hierarchy: series 1 would be works (as classified by the editors, and excepting *Capital*, which would covered in popular editions); series 2 would be 'economic' manuscripts (again, as determined by editors); and series 3 would be letters written by the two (Zhao, 2014: 21). MEGA² is similarly set up (and since the 1970s, rigidly adhered to): series 1 is works, excepting *Capital*; series 2 is 'economic' manuscripts and publications, beginning in 1857-58 and including *Capital*; series 3 is correspondence, including third-party letters; series 4 is notebooks, including note-taking excerpts, and any items of miscellany.¹²

While published books and articles are easy enough to spot, unpublished drafts of works merely planned (in various ways) clearly raise difficulties. Indeed Riazanov inaugurated his project with a 'discovery' of a 'chapter' to a 'planned' work to be edited into a single 'volume' with a definitive title – namely the 'Feuerbach chapter' of the *The German Ideology* (Carver and Blank 2014). However, the more obvious – but little remarked – issue that glares at us is the classification of some works, published or otherwise, as 'economic' (rather than 'philosophical'?). Probably this reflects a division of expertise and labour that seemed obvious at the time¹³ (and still does, within the MEGA² project, where *Capital*-oriented scholars generally divide off from other experts). Perhaps the extraction of texts from manuscript notebooks, arranged for publication as a 'work' in 1932, shows this vividly in the editorial titling: 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844' (3: 229-346; see Rojahn, 2006: 33-34). This is clearly a fabrication of 'notes to self'¹⁴ that would require scholarly explication in terms that Marx did not himself use, and would have excoriated: his political battles of the time were with philosophers, precisely because they *were* philosophers. He was even then tackling political economy (not to be confused with modern 'economics') as a politically motivated critic, as the editorial titling admits.

But what kind of violence does this process of editorial selectivity and tendentious framing do to Marx's 'thought'? And indeed what happens to his self-defined *persona* when a 'thought' is assigned to him – and, perforce to all his works – particularly when the recovery of this 'thought' dominates what his writings (taken as a whole) are thought to mean? Riazanov put this with particular clarity in 1914:

... [A] scientific biography of Marx and Engels ranks as one of the most important and enticing tasks of modern historiography ... It depicts the development of their worldview in all their [*sic*] phases, which has in the same time become the prevailing theory of international social democracy (quoted in Zhao, 2014: 14).

Historical and political contextualisation can of course be fitted into this and inserted around the various items, but this does involve a downgrading of political intent, everyday activity and even contemporary intellectual context. Notoriously we read what Marx and/or Engels said about those

with whom they disagreed, whether about ideas or strategies, but very seldom the works of those whom the two were attacking. But even beginning with Engels in the 1880s, the polemics of the 1840s were dismissed as tedious, and modern readers, even those with the requisite language-skills and research-library access, have little incentive to take some of these ‘minor’ figures at all seriously, even to grasp what Marx was exercised about, and why he proceeded as he did.¹⁵ Indeed what mattered to him becomes very largely obscured, rather deliberately by those who have already decided to read him as a ‘philosopher’ or an ‘economist’. This is rather more than victors’ history, which does violence to the defeated; a history of the victors themselves does them violence if we’re not presented with a plausible version of what made their struggles meaningful – and of such importance – to them.

Perhaps paradoxically, having separated out various writings into various genres (with attendant hierarchies), collected works aim to uniformity of presentation, and thus offer considerable convenience to readers. A recourse to facsimile collections might seem quite mad in terms of book production, but in terms of digital imaging we may see more of this. A paper facsimile of the ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’ is an instructive item to look at or hand round a classroom or lecture audience; it looks and feels different, and its crudity evokes a world of activism and struggle. But the poor typography (and Gothic type, even for those who read German) present obstacles. My point here is to query what happens when all works of any kind are not only denominated ‘works’ comprising a ‘thought’ but are then made to *all look the same* on the page. This makes it easy to read Marx as a ‘thinker’ delivering items of ‘thought’ (often requiring separation from ‘inessential’ prose, particularly in the correspondence) to be treasured if consistent (with what his ‘thought’ is already ‘thought to be’) and fussed over if inconsistent, or apparently so. With indexing (at least per volume, as in the English-language *Collected Works*) it becomes quite easy to quote Marx from here-there-and-anywhere, editorial contextualisations notwithstanding.

The argument can also be put round the other way, as I found when asked to look into Marx’s thinking on ‘economic crises’ (a request not uncommon in the post-2008 political climate). While many colleagues, specialists in the ‘economic’ manuscripts, went to those volumes without question, my project – self-suggested – was to re-construct Marx’s ‘thinking’ (rather than ‘thought’) during a real economic crisis, namely the ‘world’ crash of 1857-1858. This entailed an attempt to coordinate, almost day-by-day, his analysis, writings and publication during this period, to see what his ideas were and what he wanted to do with them (rather than to extract his ‘theory’, even at that point, as if this were some singular conceptualisation).

Whether or not this is a worthwhile approach, and whether or not it would actually succeed, are still open questions. My point here is that the tendentious division of Marx’s writings into academically-oriented genres has consequences: finding one’s way (in the English *Collected Works* or in the original-languages MEGA²) is far from convenient if one approaches Marx as an activist/journalist, at work in the everyday. Tracking the dispersal of ‘works’ through various volumes, second-guessing what is or isn’t ‘economic’ as a manuscript in various rescensions, and coordinating all that with the correspondence (which lists third-party initiatives and responses separately from the relevant Marx-Engels letters) is very hard work indeed. Still, it would be harder if these items had not been collected, transcribed, introduced and footnoted. But, as is argued here, there are consequences in the genre, and in the ways that these particular collections have been organised, that require a reckoning.

Conclusions

The foregoing is not an argument that collected works should never have happened, or never be undertaken. Authors have released their texts (and their lives) to readers and posterity generally, and so don't control the play of meanings as they develop among readers (and scholars who work – sometimes at least – to interest audiences beyond cliquey specialists). Taking Marx to be a philosopher (he was certainly skilled) works for those interested in philosophy, and the same is true for those interested in heterodox economic thinking (at which he was also skilled). Collected works work hard to make these better activities, and richer experiences (and not just reading – TV and other digital media are occasionally involved).

My argument here is that too many presumptions have mystified Marx and erased what is possibly a vital and productive way to think about politics, activism, struggle and the like. And similarly it might be worth re-considering his *persona* as it was projected in his own time, his political struggles of the period against others who were not then 'minor', and even re-thinking the hierarchies involved in presuming that philosophy and economics are the important activities, and 'everyday' journalism, for instance, or even *ad hominem* polemic or spiteful correspondence, are lesser rungs on the genre ladder.¹⁶ There are yet further ways of making Marx Marx.

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¹ I am indebted here to Cynthia Weber's (2008) discussion of 'remediation' and 'reality-effect'.

² See for example Wheen (2000).

³ In English translation as Mehring (1951 [1936]).

⁴ Wheen (2000: 1) apparently reverses this methodology by trying to 'rediscover Karl Marx the man', but in his biography he merely inverts the usual focus on 'thought' by subtracting the thinking that went into the works from Marx's 'everyday'.

⁵ Subtitle of an early scholarly biography, Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen (1936).

⁶ This section draws on material published in Carver (2016: 33-36)

⁷ References to the fifty-volume Marx and Engels (1975-2004) appear as volume number and page number(s). Note that vol. 4 lists this work as by 'Karl Marx and Frederick Engels', whereas the title page of the original volume shows the authors' names with Engels first.

⁸ See the enlightening discussion of the intellectual relationship between the young Marx and utopian socialists in Leopold (2007: ch. 5).

⁹ Marx (1975) possibly gives this impression but it was not then intended.

¹⁰ This section draws on material published in Carver (2014: 68-72).

¹¹ Copyright on Marx's works was due to run out in 1913 (Zhao, 2013a: 325).

¹² <http://mega.bbaw.de/struktur> [accessed 6 January 2016]

¹³ See Zhao (2013b: 491-494) for a detailed discussion of the intellectual and physical 'cabinets' through which Rjazanov's institute functioned, involving distinctions between theory and history, philosophy and economics, and various other categorical divisions.

¹⁴ Rojahn actually argues that some of the intermingled quotations, summaries and 'notes to self' in Marx's notebooks that were ignored by the various editors of the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844' are actually more interesting and significant in revealing the content and development of Marx's thinking than the scattered passages of Marx's more continuous prose that they collected from various loose pages and (literally) sewed into 'manuscripts' (2006: 36, 45 and *passim*.).

¹⁵ Leopold (2007) is an outstanding exception to this general tendency, as is McLellan (1969).

¹⁶ Carver (2010) argues this in respect of Marx's least read and most denigrated work, *Herr Vogt* (1860).